



NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DATE: April 28, 2009

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SWINE FLU CONCERNS & INFORMATION FOR LOUISIANA RESIDENTS

Currently, the most dangerous situation in the United States concerning the swine flu is misinformation which can lead to unwarranted panic. The most important thing that you can do for yourself and your family at this time is to remain calm and gather as much information from reputable sources as possible. While the swine flu is a valid threat to the public's health it is not yet a pandemic and much can be done by simply staying informed.

To aid you in this endeavor, the Office of State Fire Marshal is providing this official press release addressing some of the primary concerns regarding the swine flu. Our goal is to help Louisiana residents stay informed by providing concise information about this type of influenza (flu) as well as detailing what precautions can be taken to keep you, your families, and co-workers healthy and safe. Please feel free to print out this information and pass it along to anyone who may have fears or concerns about the swine flu and how it will affect us.

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) at www.cdc.gov: *Swine Influenza (swine flu) is a respiratory disease of pigs caused by type A influenza virus that regularly causes outbreaks of influenza in pigs. Swine flu viruses cause high levels of illness and low death rates in pigs. Swine influenza viruses may circulate among swine throughout the year, but most outbreaks occur during the late fall and winter months similar to outbreaks in humans. The classical swine flu virus (an influenza type A H1N1 virus) was first isolated from a pig in 1930.*

Though there have - as yet - been no reported cases of the swine flu in Louisiana, taking proper precautions and paying heed to the latest health warnings is something that every individual can do to play their part during this uneasy time. As of this writing there have been only 64 confirmed cases in the United States; none of those have been in Louisiana.

Regardless, be assured that your state leaders are doing their part to keep Louisiana residents safe and are preparing for whatever may come. In fact, The Department of Health and Hospitals (DHH) is working closely with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Governor's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness (GOHSEP), and other partners. This is to ensure that they are conducting appropriate surveillance to detect any cases in Louisiana early so that they can respond quickly if an outbreak is eminent.

Further action being undertaken by DHH, per a state memo: *DHH has notified hospitals and physicians through the state's Health Alert Network and activated its statewide surveillance system of sentinel physicians—about 35 private doctors who volunteer to serve as a 'front line' of detection to assist in any public health or infectious disease investigation. The department has shipped 30,000 specimen collection kits to be available to sentinel physicians, and will have specimens tested for infection as needed. Should cases arise in Louisiana, the state has a plan for antiviral treatment that will be directed by CDC guidance.*

The Department is also working closely with the Louisiana Hospital Association, Louisiana Pharmacists Association, faith-based organizations, and many others to make sure you are properly informed and cared for. We've also recommended

that all schools across the state monitor absences and illness of their students and report any problems to the DHH Office of Public Health.

In the meantime, you can learn the basics of precaution and swine flu information from trusted sources such as the Center for Disease Control (CDC) at www.cdc.gov and the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals (DHH) "Swine Flu Information" page at www.flula.com.

Things that you can do now as preventative measures are the same basic hygiene and commonsense practices you would follow for any type of flu or bug, such as:

1. Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
2. Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.
3. Try to avoid close contact with sick people. If you are sick, stay home. Limit contact with others.
4. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth because germs can spread that way.
5. If you or anyone in your family feels sick with flu-like symptoms, stay home and away from other people. Do not send your children to school if they display flu-like symptoms. Symptoms may include high fever, body aches, headaches, coughing, sore throat, diarrhea, vomiting, fatigue and chills.

Remember, also, that flu viruses can live on surfaces for several hours, like a doorknob just touched by someone who sneezed into their hand, so regular hand washing with an anti-bacterial soap or utilizing alcohol-based hand cleaners are your most effective weapons against germ-spread.

Even those that have had no contact with flu-stricken victims, are not in known flu-infected areas, or have not traveled recently to Mexico, need to stay alert for symptoms in themselves or their children. Once again, symptoms are similar to regular human flu – a fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people also have diarrhea and vomiting.

Naturally, these symptoms could be due to other illnesses - even allergies - and not swine flu. Health authorities say if you live in places where swine flu cases have been confirmed, or you recently traveled to Mexico, and you have flu-like symptoms, ask your doctor if you need treatment or to be tested. "Allergies won't cause a fever. And run-of-the-mill stomach bugs won't be accompanied by respiratory symptoms", notes Dr. Wayne Reynolds of Newport News, Virginia, spokesman for the American Academy of Family Physicians. Still, if you have any concerns, making an appointment with your doctor is recommended.

While there is currently no vaccine to prevent swine flu, it is treatable with the regular flu drugs Tamiflu and Relenza. According to the CDC there are enough of these drugs even in the event that this becomes a pandemic. In fact, the federal government has stockpiled enough of both to treat 50 million people, and many states have additional stocks. In Louisiana, Governor Bobby Jindal stated in a press conference today that Louisiana has 370,443 Tamiflu treatment courses and 94,360 Relenza treatment courses stockpiled in the state. In addition, there are 48,120 thirty milligram and 16,045 45-milligram pediatric anti-viral doses available. There are another 669,000 courses earmarked for Louisiana in the national stockpile. The CDC is offering the state 25 percent of that stockpile, which will ship in the next seven days.

One of the most important nuggets of misinformation that is spreading around the internet is that swine flu can be contracted by eating pork. This is completely false. You are perfectly safe eating pork as swine influenza viruses do not spread through food.

At this point, while it is very important to be cautious, practice stringent hygiene, and stay informed, do not panic. Currently, the risk of swine flu in the United States is still low. As yet, outside of Mexico, outbreaks of illnesses seem to be related to Mexican travel. For example, New York City's swine flu-infected group consists of students and family members of those students at a particular school; the students in question had just returned from spring break in Mexico already ill with the virus.

This by no means is to imply that the swine flu is not a serious threat to United States citizens - yet we can all be much more prepared and safe by remaining calm and staying advised of the facts and by taking the proper precautions to reduce the threat and spread of this illness.

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